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# BULLETIN

OF

## THE PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM

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### **SOME NEW DISCOVERIES IN EARLY AMERICAN GLASSWARE**

The first industrial enterprise established in the territory of the present United States, as stated by Prof. Lyon G. Tyler in his "Cradle of the Republic," was a glass bottle factory, erected in the Virginia colony soon after October, 1608. Eight glass workers, Welshmen and Poles, were brought over to operate it. The house stood in the woods about half a mile northwest from Jamestown, near Powhatan Creek. This manufacture seems to have proved unsuccessful, and a second glass house was erected in 1621. In this year Capt. Wm. Norton brought to Virginia four Italians to manufacture all kinds of glass, among which were beads for trade with the Indians. In 1625 two glass workers, Bernardo and Vincenzio, were enumerated in the census. The latter, desiring to return to Europe, is said to have broken the furnace with his crowbar. Soon after this the glass house fell into disuse and some years later it was sold, with twenty-four acres of land, to Anthony Coleman, by the Governor, Sir John Harvey.

So far as we know, there has been no attempt by historians to describe the products of this early establishment. Recent investigations by the writer, however, have resulted in the discovery that examples of glass beads have from time to time been found on the site of the old glass house, or have been picked up on the shore of the river in the neighborhood, where they had been washed up at high water. A number of these beads, which have been fully authenticated, have recently been secured for this Museum. Among these most interesting examples of seventeenth century workmanship, which were originally of globular form and about the size of an average pea, are several of dull blue color covered with minute longitudinal striations, while others are transparent and of a pale pinkish or greenish tint ribbed with broad lines of white, somewhat resembling in appearance a small gooseberry. Some of them have been so worn by the action of the water that they have been reduced to half or a quarter of their original size, while others are coated with a beautiful iridescent patination caused by three centuries of exposure to the action of the elements. In coloring and workmanship they strongly resemble the Murano products of that period.

In addition to the manufacture of beads, more portentous work seems to have been attempted at the Jamestown glass works, as shown by fragments

of other objects found among the ruins. One of these, which has been procured for the Museum, is evidently the knob and portion of a cover or lid belonging to a bowl or other vessel. The knob itself is crudely formed and resembles an irregular, circular button, but the parts of the cover which still adhere to it are exceedingly thin and delicate and a fragment of the edge shows that it had been delicately turned under to form a rim. The color of this example is of a pale olive brown tint showing distinctly in coloring and texture, and in the manner of working, the Venetian or Murano influence. The workmen brought from Italy appear to have attempted the exercise of their highest skill and it is therefore not surprising that in view of the simple needs of the early settlers this venture should have been doomed to failure and that the glass-makers should have soon become disheartened and longed to return to their native country. In a new community where coarse glass bottles and window glass were the most pressing needs, the dainty and artistic wares of Europe would be sadly out of place. That window glass was made here to some extent, however, seems probable since small pieces have been picked up on the same site, two of which, now before me, show that it was well made and of exceeding thinness, but now entirely covered with the exquisite iridescence which can only be imparted by burial in the soil for hundreds of years.

The following description of all that remains of "the first permanent English settlement within the boundaries of the present United States of America" is quoted from a little pamphlet issued by The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society: "Jamestown herself is no more. She is a vanished city, partly buried in the earth, partly submerged in the river; for that which was once a peninsula is now an island, completely severed from the mainland and steadily disappearing under the ceaseless gnawing of the surrounding stream. Upon the shores one may gather, like crumbs dropped from the river's greedy maw, pieces of brick from the foundations of the houses that sheltered the pioneers, beads with which they bartered with the aborigines, and stems and bowls of the tobacco pipes with which they consoled their hours of suffering. A hundred and fifty feet from the encroaching waves a few quaint grave-stones with silent eloquence attest the mortality of an heroic generation, and a solitary and impressive church tower bespeaks the inspiration that sustained it through its sufferings. But that is all that is visible of ancient Jamestown—all that remains above the soil as a physical reminder of that thrilling opening chapter of our national history which records the phenomenal faith, daring and endurance by which a new civilization was planted in this western wilderness three centuries ago." The island, now private property, is for sale. What an opportunity is here offered for some wealthy person to secure it and explore its buried foundations for historical relics, in which it abounds!

Among the earliest successful glass works in the United States, and supposedly the first flint glass manufactory in America, was that established in Lancaster County, Pa., by Baron Henry William Stiegel, who came from Manheim, in Baden, Germany, in 1750, and who, twelve years later (in 1762), laid out the Pennsylvania village of the same name.

In 1757 Stiegel purchased from Jacob Huber, his father-in-law, an iron furnace in the same county, which he named the Elizabeth furnace, in honor of his first wife, Elizabeth Huber, where for some twenty years he manufactured ornamental iron stoves, quaint examples of which are still in existence. After the breaking out of the war of the Revolution cannon and shot for the American army were made there.

About the year 1763, Baron Stiegel erected a glass house in Manheim and began the manufacture of flint or lead glass, known in Europe as crystal glass, which he continued for about ten years. Tradition states that this structure was built of brick, in the form of a dome, ninety feet high, whose dimensions were so great that a coach and four horses could enter the doorway and turn around in the enclosure. He secured skilled workmen from the best factories of Europe, and the wares produced, after the most approved methods of the period, found their way into the homes of the well-to-do people of that day and many examples are still preserved. Improvements were made in the manufacture from time to time as is shown by an original agreement dated June 4, 1773, in possession of Mr. George H. Danner, of Manheim, between Henry William Stiegel, owner of the "American Flint Glass Manufactory," and Lazarus Isaac, glass cutter, of Philadelphia, described as a "cutter and flowerer," who was to receive wages of five pounds, ten shillings a month. By the term "cutter" we do not understand that this workman actually cut and polished glass in the modern sense, as no examples of true cut glass have come to light which could be attributed to this factory, but numerous specimens of blown glass, ornamented with surface etched or



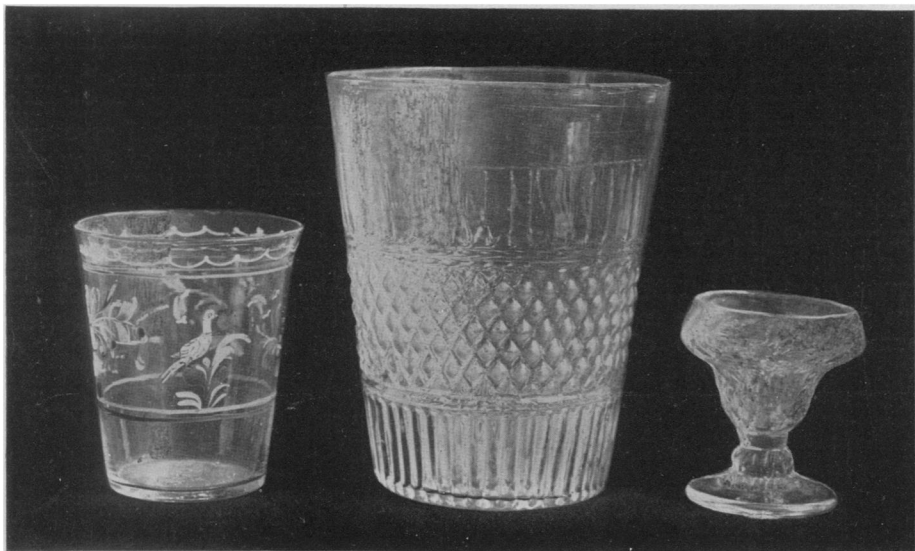
STIEGEL GLASSWARE (1763-1774)

Dark Blue Color

Blown in Patterned Moulds

engraved designs of tulips and other floral devices, have survived which were made at these works. In these pieces the "cutting" and "flowering" have been done with a wheel or sharp instrument, the strokes of the hand work being distinctly visible and entirely distinct from the frosting produced by means of acids.

The manufacture of glass at Manheim continued from about 1763 to 1774. Stiegel and his partners, Charles and Alexander Stedman of Philadelphia, purchased some 10,000 acres of land in Lancaster County, which necessitated the borrowing of large sums of money. Stiegel became financially embarrassed by business reverses and the stagnation resulting from the



STIEGEL GLASSWARE (1763-1774)

Tumbler of Clear Glass  
Painted in Enamel Colors

Large Flip Glass  
Blown in Patterned Mould

Salt Cellar  
Blown in Mould

impending war, and after ineffectual attempts to surmount his difficulties, he was, in 1774, cast into prison for debt, where he languished for several weeks. Mr. Danner has in his possession a copy of a printed notice published by Stiegel, which reads as follows:

"Sir:

"Philadelphia, December 15, 1774.

"Please to take Notice, that I have applied to the Honourable House of Assembly, for a Law to relieve my person from Imprisonment. If you have any Objection, please to attend on Thursday next, at three o'Clock in the Afternoon, at the Gaol in this City, before the Committee of Grievances.

"Your humble Servant,

"HENRY W. STIEGEL."

In compliance with this application, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed an Act for his relief and he was liberated on December 24th, 1774. Having acquired a liberal education in Germany, after his release from prison he struggled against adverse circumstances until the year 1778, when he went to Brickerville, the home of his first wife, where for some time he preached and taught school. He died in poverty in 1783, at the age of fifty-three.

During his palmiest days Baron Stiegel lived in considerable pomp and splendor. He first occupied a spacious house near his iron furnace and afterwards erected a fine, large mansion in Manheim in the midst of extensive grounds. As he rode home at sunset, after spending a day in superintending his enterprises, he was accustomed to being saluted at the entrance of his park by the firing of cannon and welcomed by music played by a band of musicians stationed on the roof of his house. The interior of the building was furnished sumptuously. One room contained a large fire-place which was lined with old Dutch tiles (some of which may now be seen in the rooms of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania) and the walls of the parlor were covered with canvas tapestry on which was painted a representation of a hawking party, the outlined figures being of life size. A portion of this tapestry is now in the Danner Museum in Manheim. The second floor contained a chapel with a pulpit, in which the Baron preached to his employees on Sundays.

In 1772, at the height of his prosperity, Baron Stiegel deeded a plot of ground to the Lutheran congregation, in consideration of the annual payment thereafter of one red rose. It was demanded but twice during his lifetime, but of late years the ceremony has been revived by his descendants. The celebration of the Feast of Roses in the month of June continues to be an event of great interest which attracts widespread attention and draws crowds of people from the surrounding country and neighboring towns.

Nothing remains to-day to mark the site of the glass house which stood within the town limits. The Stiegel mansion has been greatly altered, and now forms the end of a solid block of structures on the main street, but portions of the original walls, built of imported red and black bricks, are still standing. One block across, on a parallel street, stands the office building, which has thus far escaped the destructive march of modern improvement, where the Baron transacted his business.

The Stiegel glassware was of better quality than any produced elsewhere in the United States down to the period when its manufacture ceased, notwithstanding the statements of Benjamin Franklin and John Penn (see letter below) that it was of very ordinary quality. Although the works were only operated for a period of ten or eleven years, a considerable quantity of glass must have been produced, as many identified pieces are to be found in the possession of collectors. In addition to those collections already mentioned, Mr. Robert Coleman Hemphill of West Chester, Pa., possesses a set of the dark blue sugar-bowls, which, without their lids, now serve the purpose of finger bowls. These were made for his ancestor, Robert Coleman, who succeeded Stiegel in the management of the Elizabeth iron furnace.

The following extracts from a letter written by John Penn to the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations\* establishes the fact that the glass

\*Pennsylvania Archives, Fourth Series, Volume III. p. 333

works were in operation several years previous to the date (1768) usually given by historians as the commencement of the enterprise.

"Philadelphia, January 21st, 1767.

"My Lords:

"I had the honour to receive from your Lordships a Letter of the 1st of August, in November last, desiring me to transmit to you an Account of the Manufactories set up & carried on in this Colony, since the Year 1734; and having since endeavored to inform myself on this Subject, I am now to acquaint your Lordships that I cannot find the least publick Encouragements have ever been given to the Establishment of any manufactory within this Province, nor do I know of any actually carrying on at this time, except two \* \* \* \* The other is a Glass manufactory, which was erected about four years ago in Lancaster County, Seventy miles from this City, by a private Person, it is still carried on, tho' to a very inconsiderable Extent, there being no other Vent for their Ware, which is of a very ordinary Quality, but to supply the small demands of the Villages and Farmers in the adjacent inland Country.

"If any Manufactories should hereafter be set up within this Province, your Lordships may depend on my care to Transmit you an Account of the same, as I am made acquainted therewith.

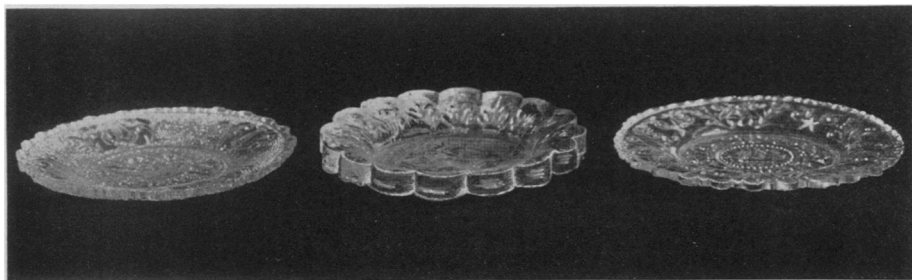
"I have the Honour to be,

"Your Lordship's most Obed't

"humble Servant,

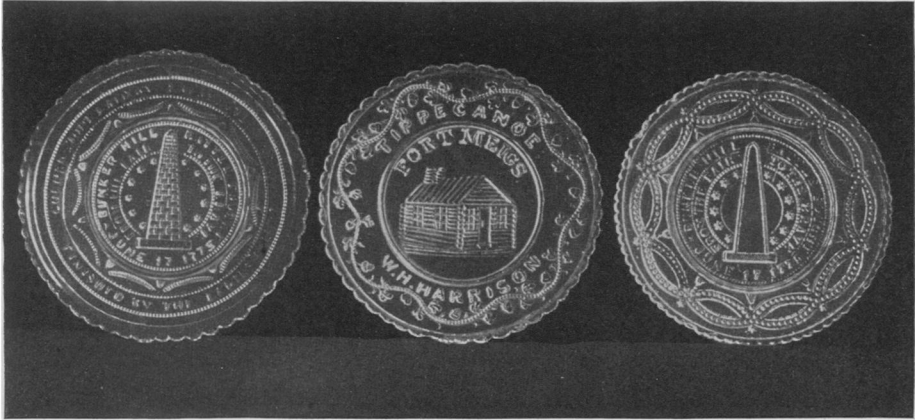
"JOHN PENN."

Notwithstanding the above statement, it is known that the Stiegel glass-ware was shipped to Lancaster, Philadelphia, New York and Boston and the writer recently identified several pieces of this manufacture in the collections of the Essex Institute, at Salem, Mass.



PRESSED GLASS CUP PLATES  
Made in the United States, 1830-1840  
The Middle one, of Thick Glass, is the Earliest

An interesting account of Baron Stiegel's enterprises was published by Dr. J. H. Sieling in 1896, in which he mentions a curious coincidence. The Elizabeth furnace, which was started in 1757, was finally closed in 1857, after running exactly one hundred years, and the old church building in Manheim, which stood on the plot of ground deeded by Stiegel, was razed in the latter



GLASS CUP PLATES  
With Pressed Designs  
American, About 1840

year for the erection of the present modern structure. This writer states that the products of the Manheim glass works were vases, sugar and finger bowls, salts, flasks, pitchers, tumblers, wine glasses and toys.

Collectors have for many years been interested in the little tea cup plates which were produced extensively in pressed glass between 1830 and 1845 with intaglio decorations of a historical or political character, such as portrait busts of eminent Americans, representations of noted steamboats, historical monuments and commemorative designs of celebrated battles. It has always been supposed that these plates were produced in England for the American market, but the writer has recently discovered that these interesting objects were made in this country and many of them have been traced directly to the factories where they were produced. Pressed glass was first made about 1827, the earliest products being thick and clumsy. These newly discovered facts will be presented for the first time in a hand book on glass, which the Curator is now preparing.

EDWIN A. BARBER.